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Identity in urban spaces of residential compounds: Contributing to a better environment

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Abstract Man is the core of any study and his needs, inspirations, and contributions are the main motive for scientists and researchers. Man's daily life is directly affected by the surrounding environment, as the daily contact with nature is essential for his psychological health. In this context, houses are essential, as people devote much of their effort, time, and money to rearrange, and decorate their living spaces. Correspondingly, these living spaces have a great effect on their owners.

Some Communities make an outstanding contribution to the “big picture” of the environmental scene where ‘Identity’ is a major element; this picture (=environment) affects its inhabitants (=stakeholders) directly and indirectly.

Stakeholders should feel involved in the environment they live in or deal with, and closely attached to its elements to obtain a comfortable urban space. Identity plays a major role in giving this feeling to each user of that space: especially the most common used spaces by all of us: the ‘urban residential spaces’.

Thus, this research will focus on the existence of ‘identity’ in urban spaces of different residential compounds in order to find answers for the following questions: Is identity reflected in urban spaces of residential compounds? Do the design elements used by the urban designers reflect identity? if yes, what are the key design elements (to be used as criteria) and their priorities? An empirical study will go through different projects in Egypt in order to find the needed answers.

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Introduction

The term ‘Identity’ is replacing the term ‘Culture’ nowadays. Recently many strategies have been followed by cities, particularly those with perceived problems concerning image and identity. One of policies implications has been the designation of ‘cultural quarters’, as areas where a ‘critical mass’ of culture-related activity is seen are providing the basis for further related uses [1].

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Researches on the 'place & identity' are highly required nowadays, to explore the ways that locales imbued with personal and social meanings. On the other hand, residential areas were and still are the core of study for a large number of researchers because of their important effect on 'Personal and social meanings'. From that point, this research will focus on 'Identity' in residential urban spaces from the following aspects: the issue of gaining a control over space in order to feel a positive sense of self-identity; the issue of using, arranging, or decorating that space in order to create a psychological comfort and reflect, identity or personal well-being; and the issue of maintaining significant places of the past, so that sense of control and identity experienced at an earlier age gets supported by reproducing the essence of a significant past environment [2]. Moreover, residential areas are the type of areas that mostly affect all of us as they are the most areas that we deal with as they are the primary means of everyday interaction between humans and the environment. Approximately 75% of people in developed regions live in urbanized areas, and an estimation of 41% of urban land area is used for houses and their surroundings as mentioned in the report of UN 2010 [3]. Designers, through their designing process, are always seeking to meet 'Man' needs by providing him by a feeling of involvement and interaction with the space, and consequently a feeling of love to that space.

All the previous could be achieved by focusing on 'Identity' as a key element of the design process.

An empirical study of several residential compounds in Egypt will take place, at the aim of figuring out the percentage of existence of the sense of 'Identity' in these communities reflected by their urban residential spaces, in addition to identifying the priorities of design key elements (= the tools out of setting criteria) which affect the identity existence in these spaces and consequently contribute to a better urban residential compound. Assessment will take place by interviewing stakeholders in order to focus on the main keys of design and their priorities to them as a guide for designers to achieve their desired goals, and a step toward a better environment.

Identity in urban residential spaces

Identity

With the new design and management improving visual esthetic qualities of the public space and creating a strong visual identity, the new public space has arguably started to function as a catalyst for image-led regeneration of the city center. New design has also generated a strong "visual identity" for the Haymarket. The use of high-quality construction materials, particularly ornamental and elegant ones, and expensive and distinctive artworks and design elements has embellished the Haymarket and created a "chic" architecture. Each claim may shape one part of the city, or one aspect of a place, and the interaction among these claims and counter-claims shapes the complex city of people and places. Resistance, transgression and competition are as much signifying characteristics of these places as the claim to cause a fixed or abstract. The goal of designers to control the character of a housing scheme of its spaces can be achieved by a different use of the place, one that they did not envisage or accept. The intentions of local authorities to formalize development

and promote a sanitized identity for the city may be met by the colonization space by groups that threaten that image. The traditional authority and status of a place may be undermined by the growth of population around it and the expansion of places and activities. Actions may have more unintentional consequences and challenges than there are different than the desired outcomes. Furthermore, the strong visual identity has been developed by introducing "variety and diversity" to the design through various manufactured and imported images, which are not only in harmony with each other but they also create a landscape of visual identity, called a 'scenographic variety' as for Crilley (1993) [4], and in response to abstract space, which is fragmented, homogeneous, and hierarchical, the uniqueness of personalized and collectivized space reasserts itself, and such organic concepts of spatial integration arise as personal space, social space, the image of space, residential space, and even global space [5]. However, knowing a place well requires long-term residence and deep involvement as it is possible to appreciate the visual qualities of a place by one short visit. Though particular parts or elements may be highly influential, place identities (scene of place) are a creation of the areas as a whole rather than any specific part or element. The scene of place does not exist in any particular part but in the combination of those parts into a greater whole. A building, for example, is part- but only one part- of the place experience -Dovey (2010: 16-7)-, which describes places as 'assemblages', arguing that: "*the scene or meaning of a place are neither found within the material urban form nor are they simply added to it, rather they are integral to the assemblage.to see places as assemblages is to avoid the reduction of place to text, materiality or subjective experience. What we call 'sense of place' is a phenomenon that connects or spans this materiality | expression dimension*" [6]. In conclusion, we can say that the three categories (activity, physical image, and image) combine together to form the scene of the space, from which 'identity' could be managed. That is why these elements are our objectives in this study; in addition, these elements will be used as key design elements when assessing the identity of the urban space.

Urban residential spaces

The implications for planning, design and management with ecology explored: urban dwellers should be able to choose their preferred way of interacting with the residential settings that should accommodate a wide variety of user needs [7]. Attention is shifted to urban development with a much focus on commercial activities and everyday life, particularly, the residential buildings [8].

The urbanization of the world, which is one of the most impressive facts of modern times, has wrought profound changes in virtually every phase of social life. The complicated phenomena of urbanism may require unity and coherence if the sociological analysis proceeds in the light of such a body of theory. The empirical evidence concerning the ecology, the social organization, and the social psychology of the urban mode of life confirms the fruitfulness of this approach [9]. Residential and commercial districts were to co-exist with the national life of the capital. The symbolic, ceremonial function of public space is expressed in monumental formality, giving a contextual frame to which all segments of the fabric are tied.

Monumentality, by definition, transcends period styles, giving timelessness, an enduring historical framework to form and space. The idea of monumentality is an abstraction expressed through size, symbolism, and setting rather than through an explicit formal vocabulary [10]. The more a city promises for the individual, the less it seems to have a public life; the more the city is built for public entities, the less the individual seems to count. The good urban environment is one that somehow balances these goals, allowing individual group identity while maintaining a public concern, encouraging pleasure while maintaining responsibility, remaining open to outsiders while sustaining a strong sense of localism [11].

Activity patterns in public outdoor spaces, outside residential communities, are different to general urban public outdoor space. This broadly, but not fully, supports current theories concerning activities in public spaces, as some environmental factors have impacts on the level of social interaction. The relation between outdoor space and a residential building may have a significant impact on the level of social status. Thus, the challenge is how to encourage people leave their comfortable homes and spend a short time in these spaces. For residential buildings and urban spaces to be treated as an integrated whole, the outdoor open spaces close to and surrounding these buildings must have a more welcoming design

[12] that gives the stakeholders the feeling of unity with the space, through creating 'identity' in it.

Empirical study

Selection phase







The empirical study will target one of the countries that is deeply attached to its history and identity 'Egypt'. The selection criteria of residential zones were as follows:

- Cases study will all be residential compounds
- Mid- to high classes
- Existence in new cities

On the other hand, these residential compounds are selected to be different in

- Scale
- Existence time
- (Exist up to 6 years = new, exist more than 6 years and less than 12 = moderate, exist more than 12 years = old)
- Owners' type
- Design character

Table 1 Cases' properties. Source: Researcher, 2016.

	Al-Rehab <i>New Cairo</i>	Zizinia <i>New Cairo</i>	Al-Dyar <i>New Cairo</i>
Scale	10 million m ²	59.20 Acres	Four phases, with secret details
Density	~200,000 inhabitant	~6000 inhabitant	The Egyptian intelligence
Owner	Talaat Moustafa group holding company, one of the biggest private Egyptian companies	ARDIC development, one of the development companies in Egypt	New
Existence 'residence' time	Old	Moderate	
Design character			
	Garden hills 6th of Oct.	Giza plateau, Mountain view 6th of Oct.	Mina garden city 6th of Oct.
Scale	150 Acres	16.3 Acres	240 Acres
Density	~17000 inhabitant	~1000 inhabitant	~4000 inhabitant
Owner	Arab Egyptian company for modern buildings and reconstruction	Dar Al-Mimar group, one of the important companies on real state	Mena is an Egyptian incorporated company
Existence 'residence' time	New	New	Moderate
Design character			

– Densities

According to the previous criteria the researcher chose “New Cairo, Cairo”, and “6th of October city, Giza”, and the selection of the case studies was according to the previously mentioned points as shown in Table 1.

Questionnaire phase

Interviews are held with different stakeholders (residents, and engineers to fill up a questionnaire that is divided into two parts, the first is to evaluate the existence of identity in the cor-

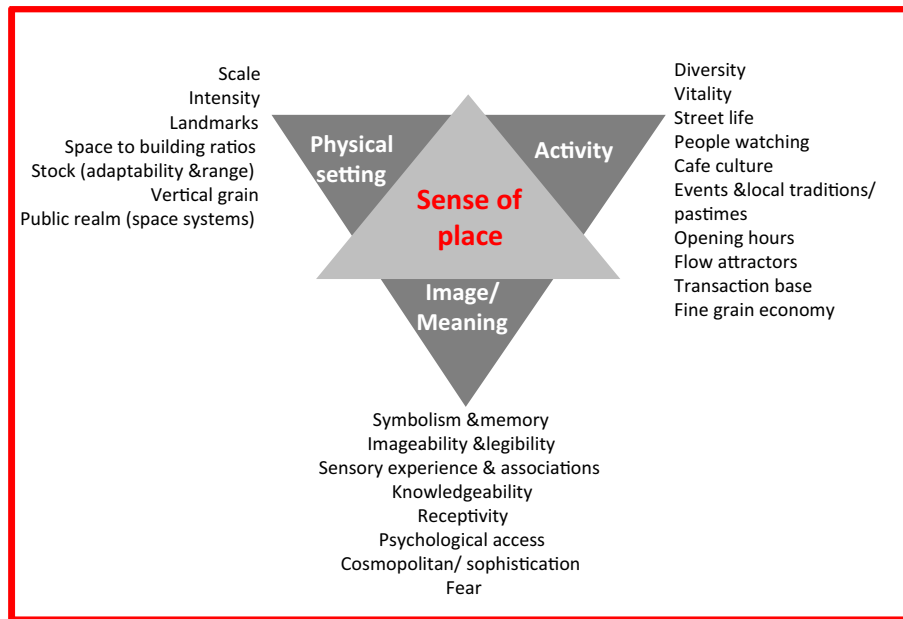


Fig. 1 Sense of place. Source: Carmona, M., Tiesdell, S., Heath, T., and Oc, T., 2003. P.122.

Study Introduction Researches on the 'place & identity' are highly required nowadays, to explore the ways that locales imbued with personal and social meanings. On the other hand, residential areas were and still a core of study for a high number of researchers for its importance effect on 'Personal and social meanings'.		INFO. Compound name; _____ Name; _____ Gender; _____ Age; _____ Nationality; _____ Occupancy; _____ Date; _____ E-mail; _____	
PART (A): To identify 'IDENTITY' existence in urban residential compounds		Please highlight on the grade that suites Identity existence in your compound = zero = 100 v. weak weak moderate strong v. strong	
PART (B):		To measure priorities of design key elements causes 'IDENTITY'	
PLEASE ARRANGE ACCORDING TO THEIR PRIORITIES FROM YOUR POINT OF VIEW			
Image/ Meaning: (1/2/3) <input type="checkbox"/> Symbolism & memory <input type="checkbox"/> Imageability & legibility <input type="checkbox"/> Sensory experience & associations <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledgeability <input type="checkbox"/> Receptivity <input type="checkbox"/> Psychological access <input type="checkbox"/> Cosmopolitan/ sophistication <input type="checkbox"/> Fear		Activity: (1/2/3) <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity <input type="checkbox"/> Vitality <input type="checkbox"/> Street life <input type="checkbox"/> People watching <input type="checkbox"/> Cafe culture <input type="checkbox"/> Events & local traditions/ pastimes <input type="checkbox"/> Opening hours <input type="checkbox"/> Flow attractors <input type="checkbox"/> Transaction base <input type="checkbox"/> Fine grain economy	
		Physical setting: (1/2/3) <input type="checkbox"/> Scale <input type="checkbox"/> Intensity <input type="checkbox"/> Landmarks <input type="checkbox"/> Space to building ratios <input type="checkbox"/> Stock (adaptability & range) <input type="checkbox"/> Vertical grain <input type="checkbox"/> Public realm (space systems)	
THANK YOU			

Fig. 2 Questionnaire model. Source: Researcher, 2016.

responding compound (in order to identify the level of identity existence in residential compounds in Egypt)).

Different processes and forms were used to build up a questionnaire; ruler type is one of them. This type will be used in the first part of the questionnaire after defining 'identity' and highlighting grades intervals. This is an approach to scoring the value of options on a criterion which is to approach the issue, by eliciting from the stakeholder a series of verbal pairwise assessments expressing a judgment of the performance [13].

The second part is to:

1. Arrange the most affecting category of the three mentioned (Image/Meaning, Activity, and Physical setting) through numbering them in an ascending order according to the priorities of each stakeholder.
2. Find out an answer to 'What are the key design elements' priorities that affect identity?' – From the literature review, Fig. 1 is to identify each key's weight where all of these keys are involved in the model of questionnaire (Fig. 2). According to MCA (multi-criteria analysis) identity the objectives and criteria are one of the ways to extract results, where Image/Meaning, Activity, and Physical setting are the objectives required to contribute to 'identity' existence – From the literature review, Fig. 1, the criteria to reach these objectives will be through the design key elements. This

enabled the group to develop a hierarchical model of objectives and criteria; a value tree at last contributes a better environment [14].

The below model was filled out by 47 different persons, and 42% were females (95% of them are residents, between 20 and 54 years old, while only 5% of them were consultant engineers); in their early 30 s, the other 58% were males (26% of them were from the consultant office and their ages are between 32 and 45, while the rest are 20 residents with the percentage of 74% and their ages are between 25 and 65).

N.B.:

- For newly existing compounds, only already inhabited phases were under study, and their stakeholders were asked to fill out the questionnaire model.
- Statistical calculations are used in this part to arrange elements' priorities in an ascending order according to questionnaires' answers.

Results

According to the questionnaire, results were divided into two parts as follows:

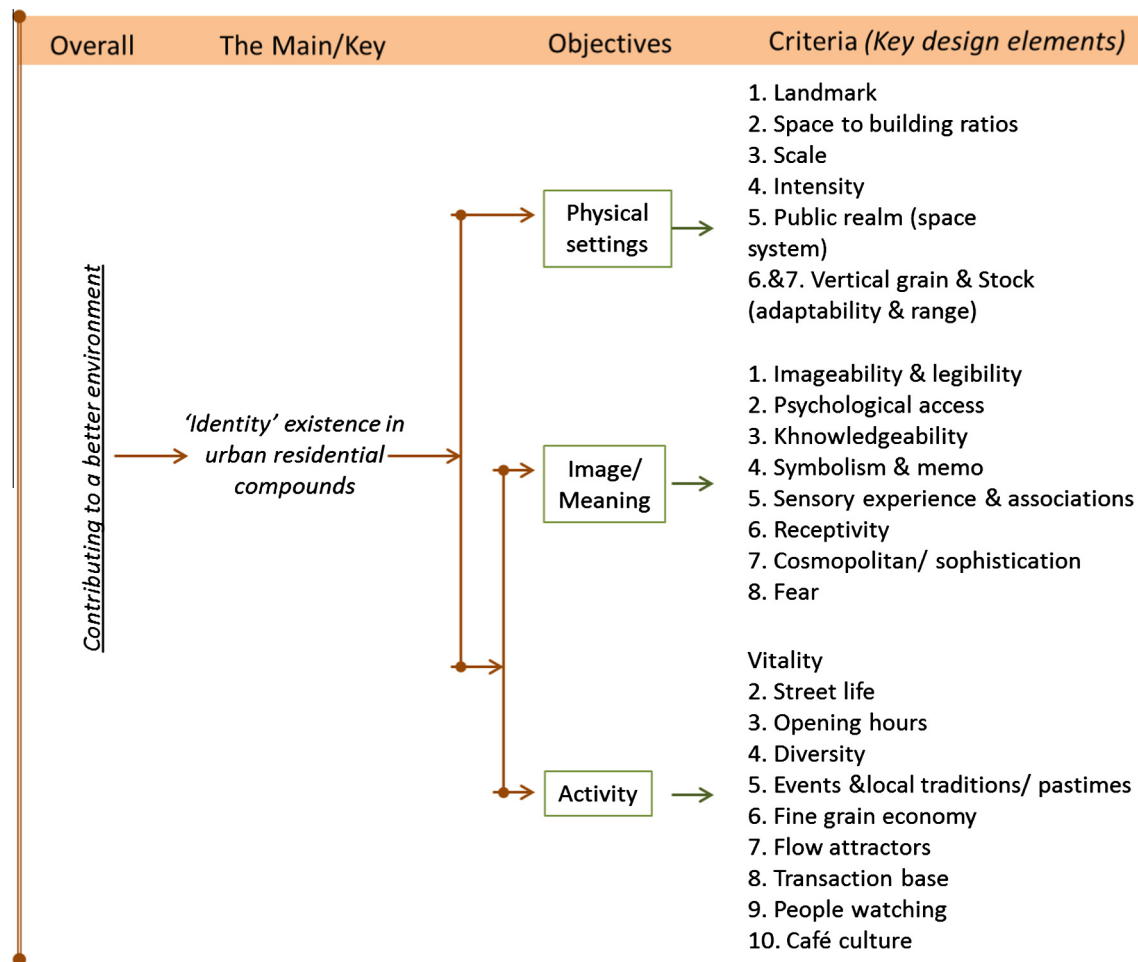


Fig. 3 Hierarchical representation of objectives and criteria for empirical study. Source: Researcher, 2016.

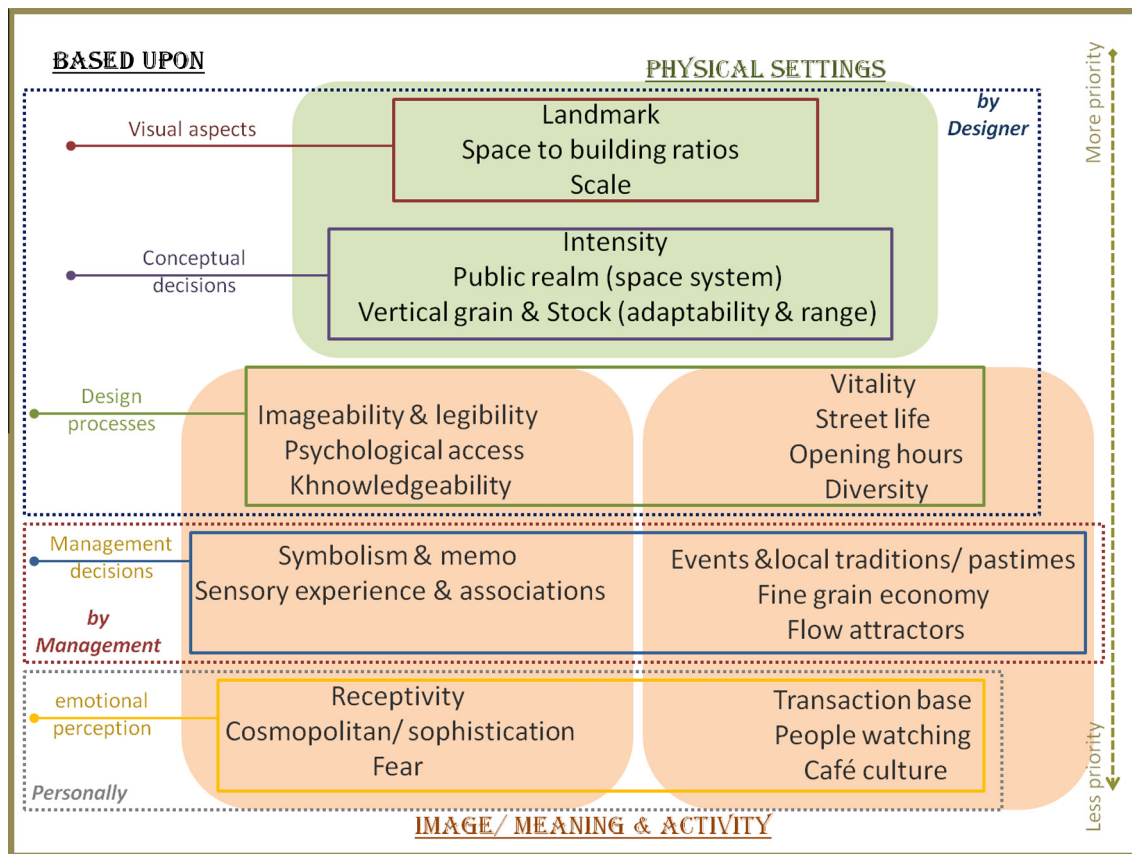


Fig. 4 Identity responsibilities chart. Source: Researcher, 2016.

– Part (A) results;

The outdoor spaces close to and surrounding the buildings which have a welcoming design and give the feeling of unity with the space – within cultural and social aspects – through creating ‘identity’ are of moderate to strong existence. That means that the average percentage of identity existence in the Egyptian residential compounds is 66%.

– Part (B) results;

After analyzing the questionnaire answers using statistical and mathematical methods the results were as follows:

First

When arranging the three main categories (which are our main objectives) of the design key elements, the researcher found that stakeholders arrange them as follows: ‘Physical settings’ is the most important, while the ‘Image/Meaning’ and the ‘Activity’ equally come next.

Second

The mathematical results give us an arrangement for the elements which create sense of place (our objectives – as mentioned in previous part ‘Identity’) and the key design elements (which are used a criteria – as mentioned in the

abstract). By using one of the MCA processes as mentioned previously ‘Identifying the Objectives and Criteria’ the following figure (Fig. 3) is obtained. These results develop a hierarchical model of objectives and criteria, a value tree (To display the value tree in portrait mode, the value tree is shown tipped on its side, with the highest level node overall shown at the left, and the bottom criterion shown at the right. Subsequent explanations will refer to higher and lower levels as the tree is organized and arranged top-to-bottom).

Conclusion

According to study results we can notice that:

- ‘Identity’ does not exist in residential compounds in a way that reflects its real value in our communities.
- ‘Physical elements’ are always the most noticeable and affective elements to stakeholders.
- ‘Image and activity’ are equal in their importance to the stakeholders, but this varies from one to another according to personal differences.
- ‘Landmark’ – as always- is the first priority.
- Physical settings, images, and activities are considered to be objectives in forming the sense of the place, and creating its ‘identity’.

Finally, as ‘Man’ is the core of any study with his desires and needs, it is his right to find an identity in the urban spaces

surrounding his residential compound; an identity that would contribute to a better environment.

Discussion

According to the whole study the researcher finds that 'identity' existence is under the responsibility of each of the designer, management, and personal background correspondingly, in a chart as shown in Fig. 4.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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